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ABSTRACT

The investigators in this qualitative study at Towson State University, Maryland, continue to examine various materials gathered from the experience of four preservice elementary teachers. Student records and journal entries, and structured interviews of students, cooperating teachers and college supervisors revealed recurring patterns in the areas of: (1) view of work; (2) attitude; (3) personal relations; (4) practical skills; (5) investment; and (6) assessment. The data suggests implications for ways to better monitor the work of beginning teachers, either at the preservice or inservice level, and to develop better teacher education programs that meet the needs of those beginning teachers. It appears that greater attention needs to be given to concerns and priorities of beginning teachers. (Author)

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TRANSITION TO TEACHING: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE PRIORITIES OF TEACHERS-IN-TRAINING

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SP 030 419

Transition to Teaching: A Descriptive Study of
the Priorities of Teachers-In-Training

INTRODUCTION

Inklings for the present study came when the investigators discovered samples of these concerns while perusing journals that students kept for a first field experience. The notations often indicated sentiments, concerns, and agendas that the investigators had not realized were operating. It is analogous to Erickson's notion of "the invisibility of everyday life" (Erickson, 1986:121) which reminds us that one easily overlooks the substance in the seemingly routine and ordinary. Journals, logs and such seem to be tidy devices that keep track of what transpires and what seems important in the lives of the learners.

The student concerns/priorities identified in this research study are somewhat different than those of first year teachers, though there are some similarities. Ryan (1979) speaks of five general areas of concern for beginning teachers: maintaining discipline, being liked by students, knowledge of subject matter, making mistakes in classroom, and relating to colleagues and parents. Veenman (1984), in his extensive review of beginning teacher concerns, has noted the most troubling concerns for first year teachers to be problems with discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing student work, relations with parents, organization of class work and insufficient supplies. Of course beginning teachers in these situations are on their own and in the "survival stage"--their priorities logically will be somewhat different than those of preservice people.

Other studies do address the concerns/anxieties/stresses of preservice teachers. Johnston and Ryan (1980) note the following as levels of concern for students coming into teaching: motivation, organization of work and planning,

and what to expect of pupils. But information, as in all too many studies, was gathered from questionnaires to supervisors and principals (teachers themselves are asked only rarely about their concerns, it seems). Johnston and Ryan raise the question of whether this research has adequately explored the area of beginning teacher problems. Felder et al. (1979) present similar concerns and they show the progression of perceptions that students have during the preservice period. The Fuller studies (1969) of the late 1960s are perhaps closest to the focus of the present study. Fuller's findings on the concerns of students of teaching were about: their supervisors expectations, their own subject matter adequacy, evaluation of their lesson plans, pupil reaction to them, desired standards of teacher conduct, inability to answer pupil questions, and discipline. Again much of the information is through questionnaire. Fuller's description of beginners moving from a concern with self at the beginning of the experience to a later concern with others, i.e., pupils, is an important consideration.

The present study focuses on the perceptions of four Elementary Education students who willingly participated in this examination of the ebb and flow of their priorities and concerns while they were engaged in preservice field experiences. Some interesting contrasts with the findings of prior studies are revealed and some similarities to the Fuller investigations are intriguing.

The investigators feel the information and insights generated by this study can be helpful to trainers of teachers wishing to refine preparation programs to permit the most productive induction. At most institutions for teacher preparation, program evaluation and feedback is done with pencil and paper instruments at the end of the undergraduate experience. This practice, while helpful in some respects, cannot address the beginner's agenda and priorities;

portents for the beginner have usually faded by the time the end point in the program has been reached. As with other enculturation cases, the perspectives in a novice subgroup are frequently not apparent to the veterans in the group--even though the veterans may be supervising the experiences of the novices being inducted. For example, in the present study it is clear that some anxieties and concerns registered by the student-subjects had not been anticipated or recognized by the supervisors as they went about their work. Again, it is "the invisibility of everyday life." One way to address this is through the careful use of journals and interviews. "What is happening can become visible...and it can be documented systematically." (Erickson, 1986:121)

SUBJECTS

The subjects for this study were undergraduate Elementary Education majors at Towson State University. The group of four was selected from two sections taking the first major field experience course (junior year) that involves one full day of participation in a public school classroom plus a follow up seminar. The individuals involved were willing participants in the project, and agreed to keep a journal of their experiences and impressions while in their beginning teaching experience. The group also agreed to keep journals during their student teaching semester which followed.

One could say the subjects are typical Elementary Education students at the University. All were white females with above average academic records. They were all full-time students, but only one was a campus resident. Table 1 below gives basic demographic data for the individuals that participated in the study.

Table 1

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF SUBJECTS

SUBJECT	AGE	SEX	MARITAL STATUS	SES	GPA
Subject A	38	F	M	Mdl/Mdl	3.44
Subject B	23	F	S	Mdl/Mdl	2.91
Subject C	22	F	S	Upr/Lwr	3.00
Subject D	35	F	M	Mdl/Mdl	3.80

PROCEDURES AND DATA SOURCE

The investigation is a qualitative study using description of the experiences, comments and recollections of four undergraduates enrolled in the Elementary Education program at Towson State University plus interview data from key informants. The investigators have used the following methods to determine the characteristics of the subjects and to uncover their concerns and priorities.

- studying personal data from student records and autobiographical statements;
- analyzing journal entries from journals kept during the junior year field experience, and the later student teaching experience;
- using post-student teaching interview data from subjects;
- using interview data from cooperating teachers who worked with the subjects;
- using interview data from college supervisors who worked with the subjects.

The journal entries (free writes) were used as the primary source for determining the concerns and priorities indicated by the teachers-in-training. The investigators had used earlier journals of field work to determine "domains (general categories) and included terms (subcategories)" (Spradley, 1980) that appeared with some frequency in the writings of selected field experience students. The domains and included terms were refined further while the investigators worked with the journals of the four subjects. There were a total of 32 included terms (subcategories) deduced by the end point of the study, and these clustered naturally into six general categories or domains. Some examples will be helpful.

DOMAIN	INCLUDED TERM	JOURNAL ENTRY
Assessment	self assessment	I think I did a good job today.
View of Work	organization of class activity	I can see that pacing for reading groups is needed.
Attitude	anxiety	I can't wait for Friday!
Practical Skills	an idea works	We got a chance to copy down neat bulletin board ideas.
Personal Relations	interaction with child	Sarah gave me a nice hug on her way to lunch.
Investment	commitment to teaching	Teaching means so much to me now.

See Appendix I for the complete system used.

The six general categories were used to establish a global picture of each subject's concerns and priorities. These were helpful in presenting the patterns and variations in the student comments, and they permit comparisons among the four students studied. Graphing the percentages for the general categories helps

to show the comparisons of the journal analysis for the four subjects. See Figure 1.

With the journal analysis done, the investigators then generated several interview schedules to assess subjects' later perceptions of the domains established and to determine if supervisory personnel were aware of the concerns/priorities that students expressed in their journals. These schedules were: (1) interview questions for use with student-subjects after student teaching, (2) questionnaire for cooperating teachers who worked with subjects in student teaching, and (3) interview questions for college supervisors of the field experience and student teaching. The interview formats are shown in Appendices II, III, and IV.

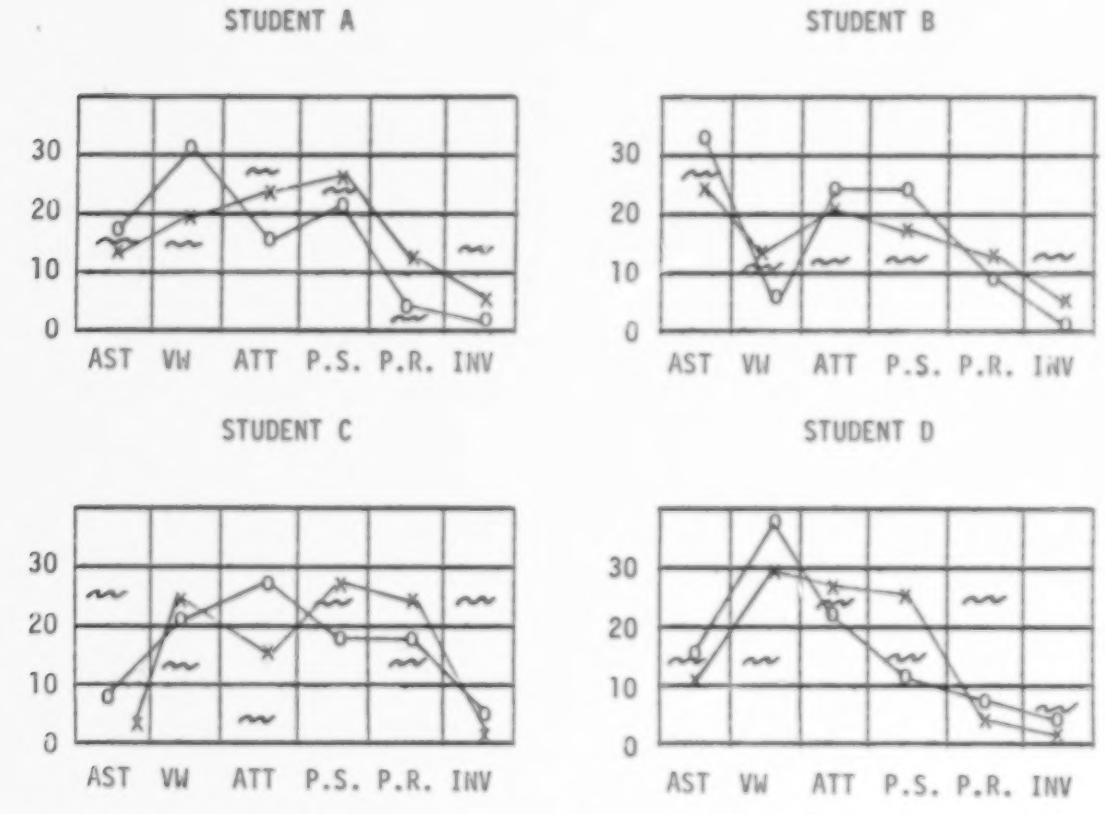
Each journal was ready by both investigators and consensus was reached on the subcategories. The entries for each domain (general category) were then quantified and totals were converted to percentages to allow for comparisons among the four subjects.

An arbitrary scale was devised to present the range and the magnitude of the priorities that the subjects evidenced for each of the general categories (domains). This is as follows:

20% or more of total entries	= high priority (concern)
10% to 20% of total entries	= medium priority (concern)
1% to 10% of total entries	= low priority (concern)
no entries	= no evidence

Figure 1 shows graphs of the four students with the scale for the general categories noted. This permits a picture of the emphasis in the six domains and, also, changes from the first experience to the second.

Figure 1. Profiles of Subjects' Journal Entries



A structured interview schedule seeking information about the six domains was used by one of the researchers with each college supervisor in a single audio-taped session. Typescripts were made of the audio-tapes and consensus was reached as to whether the supervisor answered or did not answer the question. For statements where the supervisor did answer, the information given was judged as representing a high, medium, or low concern for the subject in question.

Finally, in order to check supervisor perceptions against the results of the analysis of student-subject journals, a comparison of the supervisor perceptions is aligned with the information from student-subjects themselves. This is pictured in Figure 2.

A questionnaire used with the cooperating teachers was structured with a six point Likert type scale. The cooperating teachers' answers regarding the particular domains were converted to a high, medium or low rating that could be equated with the concerns/priorities of the students they had supervised. Those results are placed on Figure 2.

RESULTS

The data from this research show some interesting patterns and findings. Some major points are:

1. Patterns of response in the journals (see Figure 1) for the student-subjects vary considerably in portraying the several domains, giving a unique profile for each subject. Priorities apparently change from one semester to another for these teachers-in-training. Emphasis in some domains increased from Semester 1 to Semester 2, while in others the situation was the opposite.
    a. There is a regular progression from the concerns in the first field experience to the second, e.g., all students indicated less concern with "assessment" in the second experience than in the first.
    b. All students start and finish with the area of "investment" as a low concern/priority.

Figure 2.1: Student A. Comparing Student, College Supervisor, and Cooperating Teacher Perceptions in Selected Domains

	1st Exp Jrnl	Coll Supv	St Thg Jrnl	Coll Supv	Coop Tchr(1)	Coop Tchr(2)	Post St Thg
ASSESSMENT	◒	○	◒	◒	?	◒	◒
VIEW OF WORK	●	●	●	?	●	●	◒
ATTITUDE	◒	◒	●	?	?	?	●
PRACT SKILLS	●	◒	●	●	●	●	●
PERSONAL REL	○	○	◒	○	◒	◒	○
INVESTMENT	○	●	○	?	●	○	◒

Key: ● = Hi concern ◒ = Some concern ○ = Lo concern ? = No evidence

Figure 2.2: Student B. Comparing Student, College Supervisor, and Cooperating Teacher Perceptions in Selected Domains

	1st Exp Jrnl	Coll Supv	St Thg Jrnl	Coll Supv	Coop Tchr(1)	Coop Tchr(2)	Post St Thg
ASSESSMENT	●	●	●	◒	?	?	●
VIEW OF WORK	○	○	◒	○	◒	●	◒
ATTITUDE	●	●	●	●	●	?	◒
PRACT SKILLS	●	◒	◒	◒	◒	○	◒
PERSONAL REL	◒	○	◒	●	●	●	?
INVESTMENT	○	○	○	◒	◒	◒	◒

Key: ● = Hi concern ◒ = Some concern ○ = Lo concern ? = No evidence

Figure 2.3: Student C. Comparing Student, College Supervisor, and Cooperating Teacher Perceptions in Selected Domains

	1st Exp Jrnl	Coll Supv	St Thg Jrnl	Coll Supv	Coop Tchr(1)	Coop Tchr(2)	Post St Thg
ASSESSMENT	◒	○	○	◒	?	?	●
VIEW OF WORK	●	◒	●	?	●	●	◒
ATTITUDE	●	◒	◒	◒	◒	?	○
PRACT SKILLS	◒	●	●	●	●	●	●
PERSONAL REL	◒	○	●	◒	?	●	◒
INVESTMENT	◒	●	○	?	?	?	●

Key: ● = Hi concern ◒ = Some concern ○ = Lo concern ? = No evidence

Figure 2.4: Student D. Comparing Student, College Supervisor, and Cooperating Teacher Perceptions in Selected Domains

	1st Exp Jrnl	Coll Supv	St Thg Jrnl	Coll Supv	Coop Tchr(1)	Coop Tchr(2)	Post St Thg
ASSESSMENT	●	●	◒	●	?	?	◒
VIEW OF WORK	●	●	●	●	●	●	◒
ATTITUDE	●	◒	●	?	◒	?	●
PRACT SKILLS	◒	◒	●	?	●	●	◒
PERSONAL REL	○	●	○	◒	◒	●	●
INVESTMENT	○	◒	○	?	●	?	○

Key: ● = Hi concern ◒ = Some concern ○ = Lo concern ? = No evidence

c. View of Work, Attitude considerations, and Practical Skills all seem to be high priorities in both semesters for most students.

d. Assessment (except Student B), Personal Relations, and Investment seem further removed as priorities/concerns.

2. Interviews with the subjects after the conclusion of student teaching showed still further changes. Of course one would expect that as experience is gained, then changes in priorities would change, but the changes are far from predictable.

a. In some domains the concerns appear to be registered in a similar fashion as in the field experiences, e.g., students A and B presented information that was fairly close to the journal entries. See Figure 1 for comparisons.

b. Students C and D had more divergent responses in post student teaching interviews. Their reports vary quite a bit from the line graphs of the two field experiences. See Figure 1 for comparisons.

c. Perhaps the greatest change for all is in the Investment category. The interview indicates that all subjects, at the end, evidence more concern in this area than was shown in the journals. Perhaps it is a latent interest, or perhaps it may surface more during interviews when there is a prompt.

3. Data gathered from supervisors and cooperating teachers added more information to the study. See Figure 2 for comparisons.
   a. Interviews with the junior field experience supervisor showed some variance from student concerns registered in journals. For example, the concurrence is high for Student B, but is low for Student C.
   b. Interviews with college supervisors revealed that they often have a different perception of concerns and priorities of the students than those shown through the journals. For example, the supervisor for Student B concurs only with the student's information in Attitude and Practical Skills, and the supervisor for Student C concurs only in the same two domains.
   c. Interview data from cooperating teachers reflect similar profiles, in many domains, as that from the student-subjects themselves.

DISCUSSION

More work is needed on many aspects of this study; refinements are needed in the interview process and a restudy of the included terms and domains would likely render more confidence in summarizing the concerns/priorities of teachers-in-training. However, the investigators believe the work does succeed in presenting dimensions of students' lives, and development that have rarely been considered before.

From the research done with the four students, it appears that the concerns/priorities that students have during the junior field experience often have to do with View of Work and Attitude. For student teaching the strongest

concentrations are in Attitude and Practical Skills. If one speculated about the "composite student" the following would be the make up:

High concerns:	View of Work, Attitude, and Practical Skills
Medium concerns:	Assessment
Low concerns:	Public Relations and Investment

It would be interesting to find out how this composite changed during the first year of teaching.

One could ask if there is a "best" configuration for the priorities/concerns of teachers-in-training. Of course there is not, for each student brings different experiences and expectations to a program and has a personalized outlook. This means a unique set of concerns/priorities exists for each student, and these will probably diminish or intensify as the person acquires experience and feels differently about his/her induction to teaching.

With the use of proportions in this study (see Figure 1), as one concern rises another falls, since each area is compared to the other domains. When a student writes down impressions of her day, the situation that has the greatest number of entries will be proportionately the highest concern/priority. And indeed it most likely is the thing that weighed most heavily on her mind at that time.

Should we address these concerns/priorities that students appear to have? It seems to the investigators that we should if we are to attend, in a purposeful way, to the personal and professional development of teachers. But who plans out personalized preservice programs for students? Aren't all a one-track situation with standard requirements and experiences? The student who is consumed with thoughts about Assessment but has little notion of View of Work (teaching strategies etc) is expected to undertake the same challenges as the student who

has high priorities for View of Work and a low priority on Assessment. Ryan (1979) notes that our knowledge of beginners in teaching" consists largely of intuition, personal wisdom and recollections . . . with a limited foundation of thoughtful research." Maybe it is time to take a new look.

APPENDIX

Appendix I

CATEGORY SYSTEM FOR JOURNAL ENTRIES

VIEW OF WORK

- Indicate theory to practice
- Reflects on child development
- Notes problem sense
- Reflection on teaching/planning
- Interprets child behavior
- Notes organization of class
- Contrasts teaching situations
- Getting "handle" on the work

PRACTICAL SKILLS

- Idea gain
- Idea confusion
- Something works or doesn't work
- Fitting into system
- Observation/description of an idea or skill

ATTITUDE

- Positive reaction to situation
- Frustration or negative reaction to situation
- Anxiety, suspicion or doubt about situation
- Empathy with other
- Objective outlook

INVESTMENT

- Indicates missionary zeal and spirit
- States a commitment to teaching
- Indicates concern over drive/interest
- Notes negative drive

PERSONAL RELATIONS

- Friendly or negative interaction with child
- Friendly or negative interaction with teacher
- Interacts with parents or others
- Reflects on problems with others

ASSESSMENT

- Assesses self (positive or negative)
- Assesses others
- Assesses the system
- Notes assessment from others

Appendix II

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. ASSESSMENT

   a. How do you assess yourself as a teacher?
   b. How do you think others assess you?
   c. Is this area of assessment a major concern of yours?

2. VIEW OF WORK

   a. Does your preparation for teaching connect with the work you are doing in your classroom now?
   b. How often does theoretical principle affect your work in school? In what way does theory affect your practices in teaching?

3. PRACTICAL SKILLS

   a. Are tricks of the trade still of interest to you? Are these a highly important dimension of teaching.
   b. Would you say the tricks, nifty ideas, and gimmicks that keep children busy and the classroom stable, are extremely important to you at this time in your development as a teacher?

4. ATTITUDE

   a. What are some of your personal reactions to teaching?
   b. Does your attitude toward school and teaching occupy your thoughts much?

5. PERSONAL RELATIONS

   a. Thinking about personal relations in the school house, what is your situation?
   b. Are personal interactions a major concern of yours?

6. INVESTMENT

   a. Do you want to remain in teaching?
   b. Teaching is hard work. Do you find yourself committed to this as a career?

Appendix III

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COOPERATING TEACHERS

Student_____ Semester_____ Cooperating Thr._____

1. **ASSESSMENT OF SELF** (This seems to be a strong concern for many students but not all. They frequently ask about how they are doing and give evidence of anxiety when someone is going to observe.)

   a. If _____ showed that assessment (evaluation, rating etc.) was a major concern, to what extent was it?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   b. If he/she did comment often or indicate self assessment was on his/her mind, to what extent was it?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   c. Did she comment or show that assessment by others (cooperating teacher, principal, college supervisor) was on his/her mind?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   d. To what degree did _____ comment on the assessment of his/her colleagues, on schools in general, or on college?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

2. **VIEW OF WORK** (Learning to teach is a combination of (1) applying theories to classroom objectives and tasks, and (2) getting hold of practical recipes and techniques that will keep things on an even keel. Some students seem to have more flair for one or others seem occupied with the other.)

   a. How much of a grasp of educational theory (principles of motivation, child development stages, reinforcement and the like) did _____ appear to possess?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   b. Was the idea of theory to practice a major priority or concern?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   c. How receptive was _____ to gathering, trying out, or listening to the practical ideas and tricks of the classroom?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   d. Would the business of gathering a "bag of tricks" and nifty ideas for classroom use be a high priority for _____?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   e. Which of the following would describe _____'s priorities best?
      (1) keeping children busy, quiet and on task. _____
      (2) thinking about the long term development and higher order skills. _____

3. **ATTITUDE** (Disposition toward school work, teaching and children is a fairly easy thing to discern. Most students do not hide this long from colleagues and supervisors.)

   a. Was attitude registered by _____ often? Yes No

   b. How positive was the attitude displayed?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   c. How much did _____ indicate or show that attitude was a concern?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

4. **PERSONAL RELATIONS** (Another thing that is fairly easy to discern is the personal relations and interaction style of persons.)

   a. How highly developed (skillful) were _____'s personal relations practices?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   b. If personal relations was a concern to him/her, how often did it appear in conversation, comment or conference?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

5. **COMMITMENT TO TEACHING** (We find some students growing in their commitment to teaching and others changing their minds about it.)

   a. To what extent did the idea of commitment to teaching come up with ____?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

   b. How much commitment do you detect on _____'s part?
   High 6 5 4 3 2 1 Low Unk

Kindly make notes on any of the above. Please use reverse side. Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix IV

COLLEGE SUPERVISOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. ASSESSMENT

   a. How do you think _____ assessed herself as a teacher?
   b. How do you think she thought others assessed her?
   c. Was this a major concern of hers? Minor concern? Minimal?

2. VIEW OF WORK

   a. Do you think _____ thought her preparation for teaching connected with the work she was doing in the classroom?
   b. Is there evidence she was relating theory and practice?
   c. Did she reflect on child development, value of motivation, etc.? How much of a major concern was it?

3. PRACTICAL SKILLS

   a. Everyone needs a bag of tricks and handy devices to help out in the classroom, but teaching is more than that. Do you think that gimmicks and tricks of the trade dominate _____'s style and focus? Does she think that keeping children busy is better than long term development?

4. ATTITUDE

   a. What do you think _____'s general attitude was toward teaching?
   b. Do you know any of her personal reactions toward school and teaching?
   c. Was attitude registered frequently or not?

5. PERSONAL RELATIONS

   a. Thinking about personal relations in the school house, what do you think _____ though her situation was?
   b. Was this a major concern to her during the experience?

6. INVESTMENT

   a. What is _____'s commitment to teaching? Is she in it to stay? What makes you think that?
   b. Do you detect any mission spirit towards work with schools and children?

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